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ABSTRACT

This study examined a program to improve the academic success and retention of student athletes at a target community college in central Illinois. The problem of academic success and retention was identified through use of document analysis, surveys, and interviews. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that varied perceptions of student athletes exist within the academic and athletic communities. Student athletes view themselves as being as successful academically as they are athletically. However, faculty perceive student athletes as primarily concerned with athletics, and that they lack academic skills needed to succeed. A review of solution strategies suggested in the literature, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of three interventions: (1) completion of educational development plans, (2) enrollment in a life skills course, and (3) examination of progress reports. Post intervention data indicated that most athletes were responsible students. The combination of a life skills class and the diligent use of progress reports aided in the academic growth of athletes. Appended are notes from a forum on student athletes, the faculty and student athlete surveys, and a blank copy of an educational development plan for athletes. (Contains 46 references.) (RC)

IMPROVING STUDENT ATHELETE ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND RETENTION

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ABSTRACT

This study involved a program to improve the academic success and retention of student athletes at a target community college in central Illinois. The problem of academic success and retention was determined by a document analysis, surveys, and interviews.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that varied perceptions of student athletes exist within the academic and athletic communities. Student athletes view themselves as being as successful academically as they are athletically. However, faculty perceive student athletes as primarily concerned with athletics, and that they lack academic skills needed to succeed.

A review of solution strategies suggested in the literature, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of three interventions: (1) completion of educational development plans, (2) enrollment in a life skills course, and (3) examination of progress reports.

Postintervention data indicated that most athletes were responsible students. The combination of a life skills class and the diligent use of progress reports aided in the academic growth of athletes.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Student athletes at the target community college often fail to exhibit the academic skills needed to be successful students. Some choose to withdraw from the academic process altogether, and those who remain typically encounter high failure rates. As a result, student athletes tend to have lower grade point averages (GPAs) than other students attending the school. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes observations, anecdotal records of students' withdrawal rates, a review of their class performance, transcripts, and students' self-report of their program.

Immediate Problem Context

Based on the spring 2002 enrollment, the target community college has a total population of 3,673 students. Full-time students comprise 34% (n = 1,501) of the population and part-time students comprise 66% (n = 2,172). Student demographics consist of 90.7% (n = 3,331) White, 5% (n = 184) Hispanic, 1.6% (n = 60) Black, 0.8% (n = 31) Asian, Pacific Islander and 0.3% (n= 7) American Indian. (Slightly more than 1% of the students did not indicate their cultural background.) According to gender, 54% (n = 1,978) of the students are women and 46% (n = 1,691) are men. In addition, 26% (n = 952) are employed full-time, and 26% (n = 965) are employed part-time. Of those employed part-time, 716 work over 15 hours per week and 249

work 15 hours or less per week. Homemaking is listed as the occupation of 2% (n = 56) of the students, 9% (n = 341) are unemployed, and 37% (n = 1,359) did not indicate their employment status.

The staff at the target community college is categorized into one of three areas: faculty, administration, and student services. Faculty includes 81 full-time personnel of whom 7 have doctoral degrees, 60 have masters' degrees, 8 have bachelor degrees, 5 have associate degrees, and 1 has no college degree. The faculty averages 9 years of experience within the district. Likewise, there are 11 administrators in the target school of whom 5 have doctoral degrees and 6 have masters' degrees. Lastly, student services include 11 employees, of whom 9 have masters' degrees and 2 have bachelors' degrees.

The target school is structured as a comprehensive community college that provides an affordable transition for traditional and non-traditional students pursuing higher education. The staff serves the needs of the surrounding communities by providing career training, assistance to business and industry, and opportunities for professional growth and development. Individual interests are enhanced through personal growth and development course offerings and culturally enriching experiences.

Faculty, staff, and students of the target community college have increasingly expressed concern for the low academic achievement among student athletes. A task force on retention was formed several years ago and also identified this issue as a campus-wide priority. Since then, a committee was appointed by the college president to explore a possible solution to the problem.

The Surrounding Community

The surrounding community for the college encompasses approximately 2,000 square miles that includes all of three counties and portions of five counties. The student population at

the target college comes primarily from graduates of 21 high schools within the eight-county area. Based on 1999 statistics, the total population from which the student body is formed in the three primary counties is approximately 151,880. Of this number, 51% are women and 49% men. The population consists of 98.3% White, 0.9% Black, 0.5% Asian, Pacific Islander, and 0.3% consider themselves as other races. In addition, 3.6% of the total population consider themselves Hispanic. An age breakdown for the community includes 26% who are 0 – 17, 56% who are 18 – 64, and 18% who are 65 or over. The highest educational level achieved by residents age 25 and older is 4.2% with a graduate degree or beyond, 11.6% who are college graduates, 23.4% with some college or no degree, and 45.3% who are high school graduates. Approximately 16% of the residents have not acquired high school diplomas.

Of the three primary counties forming the school population, two cover a large geographic area and one is a relatively small rural community. In the two larger counties, manufacturing, retail trade and services are the three largest employment industries whereas manufacturing, farming and retail trade form the largest areas of employment in the smaller county. The mean household income in the three-county area is $45,000 and the median is $33,500.

National Context of the Problem

The academic skills of student athletes and the number who fail to exhibit success in school settings have generated concern at the national, state, and local levels (Gerdy, 2002). Nationally, the foundations involved in college sports are shaken by revelations that academic compromises are made in the interest of intercollegiate athletics (Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982). In spite of reports of this alarming priority, sporting arenas are often valued over

academics on many college campuses in order for the institution to acquire and receive recognition from society.

Frank Dowing (University of Kentucky) and Clarence Underwood (Michigan State University) established the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) in 1975 to reflect the growing concern regarding the academic progress of student athletes. The philosophy endorsed by the N4A was eventually adopted nationwide largely due to the number of student athletes who were not meeting basic educational requirements in comparison to other students. According to Funk (2000), "In the last two decades, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has passed rules that attempt to mandate that athletes get an education" (p.1). Also, several college professors responded by organizing the National Association for College Athletic Reform (NAFCAR). The intent of NAFCAR is to reconstruct college athletics in order to accomplish a more substantive academic program. As a result of growing national concern, a plethora of national committees and academic boards exist for the purpose of improving the academic success and retention of student athletes.

Academic support for student athletes has changed in the last 25 years from crisis management to a more active involvement intended to provide a wide range of programs and services designed to enhance students' academic and personal growth (Kenepp, 2002). In order to solve this national problem, researchers have concluded that colleges and universities must implement and execute athletic academic support programs. These programs must follow proposed guidelines, which in turn provide an efficient system for assessing the quality of support programs.

Colleges and universities are currently establishing academic and support programs for student athletes. According to Martin (1999), numerous groups of students are considered "at-

risk" due to a high probability of withdrawing from college. Student athletes are one of these groups. Programs designed by student athlete advisory boards and developmental educational departments in order to assist student athlete retention and academic performance have met with reasonable success. The programs developed include peer tutoring, study groups, career planning and placement, strategies for college, and life skills programs. Consequently, researchers agree that sufficient staff and budget are necessary for providing high-quality academic assistance programs for student athletes. It is also vital to supplement funding sources for academic support programs to ensure that ample services are provided (Keith, Almond, & Gratto, 2001).

According to NAFCAR, athletic departments are responsible for overseeing the education of athletes while simultaneously trying to produce winning teams (Funk, 2000). Many students, their parents, and members of the general community perceive student athletes as garnering special attention because of their athletic ability as opposed to their academic ability. Sports are a major focus of the news media, which in turn draws national attention to student athletes. As a result, there is an overemphasis on the college or university's sports program, instead of the institution's academic environment. Moreover, members of NAFCAR are concerned that the controversy exists primarily because student athletes are given higher priority over non-student athletes. The conflict creates potential animosity among students. For example, student athletes may be perceived as having more support for their educational needs and as receiving greater attention at the national level than other students.

According to Pascarella (1999), "The public's image of an institution as well as its attractiveness to prospective students are often influenced by the performance of its athletic teams" (p.1). Successful teams not only generate but also attract revenue for their institutions

from both private and public sources. However, the perception that this influx of money generates programs of academic excellence is unfounded (Roper & Snow, 1976).

In spite of the popularity of collegiate sports, problems do exist. Gerdy (2002) expresses concern that academics are not the first priority of most college athletic programs. In addition, there is a growing concern that student athletes do not succeed.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Several methods were used to document the extent of the academic success among athletes. Anecdotal records containing quantitative data regarding grades and course work for student athletes enrolled fall semester 2001 were reviewed as were notes from a forum held with the faculty, administration, and athletic department. In addition, data were collected from surveys given to incoming freshmen student athletes, faculty, and coaches, and from administrator interviews. Copies of the notes, surveys, and interview questions are included Appendices A, B, C, and D.

Student athlete records (n = 63) for fall semester 2001 were perused to collect information regarding GPAs, failed classes, withdrawn classes, and placement in developmental education classes. Statistically, freshman student athletes did well in that their average GPA was higher than the minimum 2.0 required by National Junior College Athletic Association's (NJCAA) eligibility requirements and guidelines set by the target community college. However, specific teams had significantly higher rates of withdrawals, failures, developmental education placement, and lower GPAs than others (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1

Analysis of Freshmen Student Athlete Records for Fall 2001 by Sports Category

Sport	Total Hours Attempted	Total Hours Completed	Developmental Education Hours	Hours Withdrawn	Hours Failed	Team Average GPA
Womens Basketball	94	87	19	1	7	2.314
Womens Tennis	61	60	7	1	0	2.831
Softball	128	120	22	8	0	2.793
Volleyball	84	84	14	0	0	2.951
Mens Tennis	29	16	0	6	7	1.500
Golf	64	57	5	4	3	3.006
Baseball	330	306	49	8	16	2.182
Mens Basketball	223	141	59	29	50	1.641
Total	1,013	871	175	57	83	2.402

N = 63

Of the 1,013 semester hours attempted by student athletes, 86% were completed. Table 2.1 illustrates that 14% of the hours attempted resulted in an F (failure) or a W (withdraw) on the transcript for the semester. A further analysis revealed that 17% of the hours attempted by student athletes were in developmental education courses (e.g. Pre-Algebra, Basic Algebra, Basic Composition, and Basic Reading).

A review of the notes from a forum held for faculty, administration, and the athletic department illustrates the problem under study from another point of view. All participants were provided an opportunity to address issues regarding student athletes. Participants focused on potential problems during the initial discussion, and then on suggestions for solutions. Analysis of participants' comments revealed four categories of responses: counseling issues, retention, perception, and progress reports. Counseling issues identified at the forum included student athletes registering for too many credit hours, inadequate advisement, and late add/drop activity

to remain eligible. Retention concerns focused on student athletes' inability to balance class attendance, practice, and games along with difficulty adapting to a college environment. Coaches expressed concern that student athletes were perceived as being poor students before they enter the classroom. Issues regarding progress reports included timely distribution and collection, clarity of wording, and follow-up by the athletic department. Thirty response items were identified by participants with 23% (n = 7) reflecting counseling issues, 40% (n = 12) for retention, 20% (n = 6) for perception, and 17% (n = 5) for progress reports. As a result of the forum, the Student Athlete Success Committee was created to discuss issues further and to establish institutional policies related to the four response categories.

Student athletes, for the purpose of this study, are considered freshmen if they were attending the target community college for the first time. For Fall 2002, freshmen student athletes included 53 participants who were surveyed regarding their self-perceptions as college students. Of those surveyed, 83% (n = 44) believed that they were as skilled academically as the average student attending the institution. A similar survey administered to faculty and counselors (n = 71), indicated that only 22% of the participants believed that student athletes performed as well academically as nonathletes.

The researchers also surveyed participants' perceptions of study habits. Student athletes responded to several questions regarding study habits and almost half agreed that they used good study habits. An almost equal proportion of faculty and counselors perceived that student athletes fail to exhibit good study habits. The researchers observed a wide gap between the perceptions of students versus faculty and counselors (Figure 2.1).

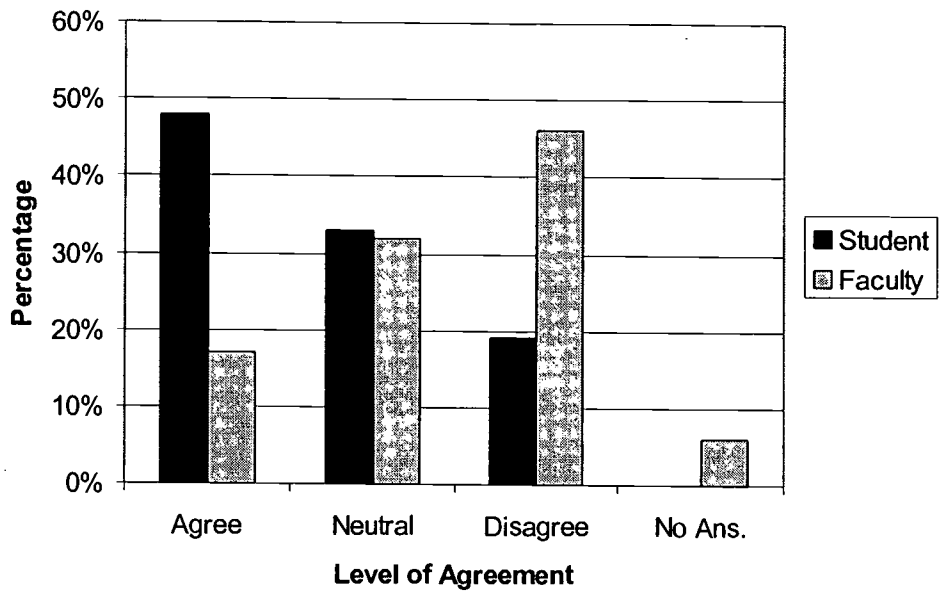

Figure 2.1 Comparisons of perceptions of student athlete study habits by student athletes and faculty and counselors.

Further analysis of the survey results identified a difference between perceptions of student athletes' ability to balance school, study, practice, work, and a social life. A total of 62% of the student athletes (n = 33) think they will be able to maintain this balance. On the other hand, only 24% of the faculty and counselors (n = 17) polled agreed that student athletes can maintain this balance. These figures indicate another disparity between the perceptions held by the two groups. Past research (Hewitt, 2002; Keene, 2000) suggested that the rigors of the various sports and the time demands made on student athletes cause these students to struggle more academically than students who are nonathletes. When student athletes from the target school were asked if they expected to have a harder time than general population students, only 9% (n = 5) agreed. The responses of the remaining student athletes were either neutral or disagree. Analysis of this data indicated that the student athletes at the target community college displayed perceptions that parallel those of student athletes nationally.

A survey item that further illustrates the difference in perceptions among student athletes and faculty and counselors addressed whether or not student athletes understood the responsibilities of being college students. As shown in Figure 2.2, student athletes overwhelmingly agreed (n = 46) that they understood the expectations for college performance. On the other hand, faculty and counselors (n = 31) were less optimistic (Figure 2.3).

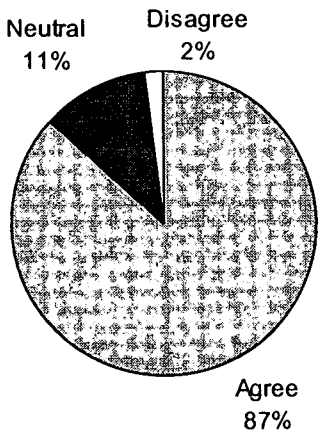

Figure 2.2 Student athlete perception of responsibility.

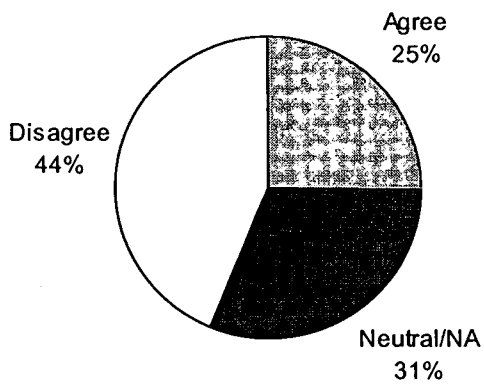

Figure 2.3 Faculty and counselor perception of student athlete responsibility.

Overall, student athletes perceived they were successful college students while faculty and counselors generally disagreed. Comments from faculty and counselor surveys further revealed a difficulty responding to some of the items surveyed. Many reported confusion in knowing how to best categorize athletes as a group. Faculty and counselors' experience with student athletes prompted some to view the athletes as individuals with diverse abilities and traits. The number of neutral and no answer responses were evidence of this view.

Ninety-two percent of the student athletes (n = 49) surveyed indicated that they understood the necessity of regular class attendance. When asked if they planned to graduate

from the target school, 94% of the student athletes (n = 50) agreed. When questioned about academic goals, 14% of the student athletes (n = 7) were able to state specific career plans. Another 18% of the student athletes (n = 9) indicated a desire to attend a university, whereas 22% of the athletes (n = 11) indicated that graduation from the target school was their highest academic goal. Nearly half of the student athletes (n = 24) provided vague responses such as "get good grades", "pass my classes", "complete my courses", "maintain eligibility", and "make myself happy."

Interviews of administrators (n = 11) were conducted to investigate their perceptions of student athletes and the athletic program. When asked about the academic success of student athletes, some responded that the athletes understood the importance of academics. Citing past history, others indicated that most student athletes tend to maintain good academic standing and achieved the dean's list only slightly less than the general population. In contrast, some administrators perceived that athletes were often not prepared for college level courses; that the athletes worked to maintain eligibility without regard for an academic goal. References were made to situations where student athletes were allowed to retain eligibility by "working the system."

When asked about the retention of student athletes, five participants had no perception because they had little interaction with the student athletes. Others perceived the retention rate of student athletes was adequate among sports where coaches emphasized academics. Several administrators believed that the retention rate of student athletes was acceptable considering that campus housing, transportation, or food service was not provided. Other participants indicated that student athletes were often not motivated to attend class, were not counseled to do so, received little to no reinforcement from coaches, and had poor retention in developmental

classes. The variation in responses from administrators revealed a lack of consensus about the academic performance of student athletes and about the quality and character of the athletes.

When asked to provide strengths, weaknesses, and possible changes for the athletic program, administrators noted that the program provides an awareness of the college to the community because many of the athletes are local talent. In addition, the success of the various teams at regional, state, and national competitions brings recognition to the college. Conversely, low attendance at athletic events by faculty, students, and community members was perceived as a primary weakness of the existing program.

Several of the interviewees commented that the college has a committed, knowledgeable coaching staff. Participants believed that the coaches and athletic director successfully recruited student athletes while working long hours for a small salary. In addition, respondents indicated that some coaches supported education first, while others placed athletics as a top priority. No consensus emerged as to the ability of athletic personnel to maintain a balance between the athletic and academic communities on the campus. Improving communication was suggested to offset potential misconceptions. Administrators also suggested creating a mission statement for the athletic department that parallels the college's statement. Other participants indicated that the job description of the athletic director needed to be expanded to include expectations beyond athletics. Participants identified the lack of a sports information director and inconsistent media coverage in the various communities of the district as weaknesses. Another weakness perceived by participants was that several coaches were not full-time college employees and, therefore, had no campus-related responsibilities.

Some of the administrators interviewed indicated that the athletic program provided academic opportunities for student athletes. Participants cited the availability of tuition waivers

made it possible for local athletes to continue their sports careers and facilitated recruitment among athletes who may otherwise have chosen to go elsewhere. Participants also noted that some student athletes would not be able to attend school without the existence of tuition waivers. For others, the waivers allowed them to prepare for transfer to four-year institutions.

Suggestions for changing the athletic program included recommendations for improving support services provided to student athletes. The ideas offered included establishing an early alert system to identify student athletes who are not performing well academically, counseling for academics and careers, and designing services to improve GPAs and retention while focusing on the individual needs of the student. Suggestions were made that progress reports be improved and be subjected to better monitoring. In addition, participants suggested modernizing and expanding the sports facility and increasing the sports budget. Ideas for expansion of the athletic program included having additional sports that would increase the number of students involved and build additional support for the program. Administrators also desired increased recognition of student athletes who do well academically and perceived a need for stronger cooperation between academic and athletic departments in order to ensure the academic success of student athletes. Administrators added that they would like to see a strong consistency in the services provided to student athletes and in academic expectations for all students, not just for athletes.

Probable Causes

Notes from the faculty forum regarding student athletes, personal observations, faculty and counselor survey results, and administrative interviews pinpoint a variety of factors influencing onsite dynamics. Faculty members express concern regarding poor class attendance, inadequate time management, and the lack of study skills among student athletes at the target community college. One factor shaping faculty perceptions may be that many student athletes are

away from home for the first time and are not prepared for the social as well as academic changes taking place in their lives. Faculty believe that student athletes' self-perception is that of athlete first and student second. Furthermore, instructors also perceive student athletes as needing to stay focused on sports in order to retain eligibility as opposed to graduating.

Teaching staff also express the concern that many student athletes have little academic motivation. Poor attendance and lack of assignment completion by student athletes reinforce this belief. Faculty, however, appear to offer little support for student athletes' interests as evidenced by their lack of attendance at sporting events. Furthermore, some instructors fail to complete and return progress reports for student athletes in a timely manner.

Inadequate academic advisement is also a contributing factor to student athletes' academic success. Student athletes who self-advise tend to choose classes haphazardly with no career goal or degree path in mind. Many are not aware of, or ignore, the rigors of certain classes that would best be taken during the off-season. In addition, the target community college does not enforce the use of an assigned athletic counselor for all teams. In some instances, the student athletes rely on the advice of coaches who are not counselors. For example, a review of student records from Fall 2001 reveals that 43% of student athletes (n = 27) enrolled in more than 16 credit hours. The average semester load for a community college student is 16 credit hours. Time demands of student athletes' involvement in a sport, coupled with the additional credit hours needed for graduation, increase stress levels which lead to early withdrawals and failures. Some student athletes are encouraged to take additional classes for potential withdrawal in order to remain eligible for sports. Others use an open entry policy available in some courses as a way to remain eligible. Student athletes tend to register for these classes late in the semester after withdrawing from another course. In addition, the researchers have observed athletes registering

for open-entry courses very late in the semester in order to maintain the required number of credit hours. The courses taken do not transfer nor do they count towards degree completion. As such, the courses were taken solely to maintain eligibility to play sports. Student athletes who enroll during late registration find that their class schedules often conflict with games and practices given that sections offered at more convenient times are already filled. Consequently, student athletes settle for courses not needed for their program completion.

One concern regarding student athletes at the target community college is retention. For the purpose of this study, retention is defined as the student athlete who enrolls at the college the following semester or the next school year. Retention is not only an academic issue but it is also an athletic issue because students must maintain eligibility from semester to semester. Coss (2002) noted the retention problem in that the basketball team at the target community college has repeatedly lost players midseason due to ineligibility. Coss quoted the men's basketball coach at the target community college, "We want the same team in January as we start with in November, which would be something new" (p. 8). Likewise, a review of transcripts for freshmen student athletes from Fall 2001 and Spring 2002 yielded statistics that reflect the coach's concern for retention. Coss (2002) stated that losing players after grade reports are issued has been a problem in recent years. Figure 2.4 illustrates the percentage of student athletes who returned to the target college for spring semester and the percentage of initial freshmen student athletes who remain eligible. Men's basketball (n = 13) had a significant difference with 7 athletes not returning to the court. Of those, 5 were ineligible and 2 did not return to campus. While all women's basketball players (n = 6) returned to campus, one was ineligible to play. Retention figures for baseball (n = 20) show 18 returning players with 1 ineligible. Golf (n = 4) had 3 of 4 freshmen athletes return and all remained eligible.

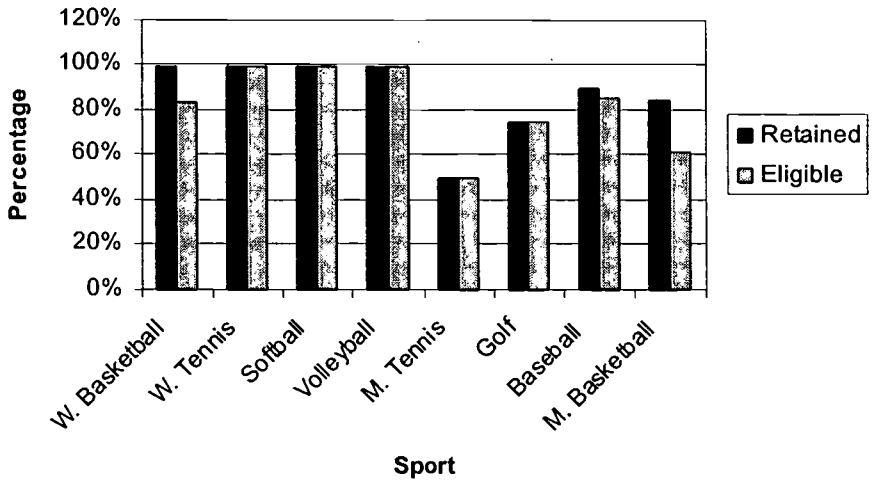

Figure 2.4 Retention data for student athletes by sport for Fall 2001 - Spring 2002.

An additional aspect of the definition of retention used for the purpose of this study is whether student athletes return to the target community college for the following school year. The retention statistics for freshmen student athletes at the target community college from Fall 2001 to Fall 2002 are shown in Figure 2.5.

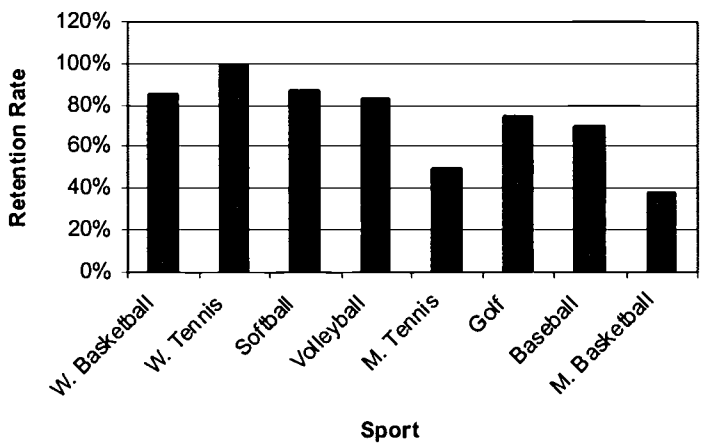

Figure 2.5 Retention data for student athletes by sport for Fall 2001 – Fall 2002.

The retention data in the Figure 2.5 illustrates that women athletes have higher retention rates than men athletes. The retention data for men's tennis is based on a small number of athletes (n = 2). The percentage of retention for men's basketball (n = 13) is significantly lower than other sports. This is a common occurrence not only at the target community college, but nationally as well (Funk, G., 1995).

A factor contributing to the lack of academic focus of student athletes at the target community college is that there are no fulltime coaches on staff. Of the eleven coaches and assistants, two are faculty members, one is a counselor, two are administrators, and one is a staff member. The remaining five are employed only as coaches and are on campus only during their season. This situation reduces the amount of contact the student athlete has with the coach thereby decreasing the amount of academic reinforcement and support provided by the coach. The absence of fulltime coaches also reduces the amount of communication between the athletic department and the faculty.

Past history of athletics at the target community college has tainted the image of the athlete in the eyes of the community as well as the faculty and staff. Recruitment of athletes from outside the district raises concerns that in-district student athletes are being overlooked. Memories of delinquent behavior by the student athletes residing in the surrounding community linger today. Out-of-district student athletes face additional pressures in the environment outside of school because of the actions of their predecessors.

The literature suggests several underlying causes that substantiate the lack of student athlete success and retention. Two avenues are presented regarding the student athlete's ability to handle the rigors of academic and athletic life in college. One avenue demonstrates that student athletes are entering college without the skills needed for what lies ahead. Purdy, Eitzen, and

Hufnagel (1982) demonstrated that student athletes are consistently less prepared than the general student population for college. The athletes are leaving high school unprepared for college with low GPAs and low ACT scores. The second avenue illustrates that the student athlete's success is also affected by what happens to him after he arrives at college. Whitner and Myers (as cited by Hewitt, 2002) described student athletes as "underprepared, unlikely to graduate, priority skewed, and manipulated by the demands of their sport" (p. 6).

According to Watt and Moore (2001), three issues related to student athletes' experiences have negative consequences. These issues involve scheduling demands, student athlete self-image, and isolation from nonathletes.

Student athlete schedules are inflexible and demanding at best. Their day is structured for them in that they have classes in the morning, practice and/or games in the afternoons and evenings, and then homework at night. Nonathletes, however, have much more flexibility in that they can choose when to eat, study, work out, and socialize. Taking responsibility for these aspects of life prepares students for the responsibilities of life after college. Student athletes have no such responsibility and may not adequately develop the skills needed for adulthood. Their daily lives are planned for them by the demands of their academic and athletic schedules. As a result many student athletes avoid responsibility and often defer decision-making to others (Keene, 2000).

Student athletes' perceptions of themselves are sometimes inadequate. Literature suggests that because of their social backgrounds, student athletes are unaware of learning deficits that they may bring with them to college (Rich, 2001). Rich also mentioned that student athletes are recruited for their athletic prowess yet must perform academically to remain eligible. Student athletes attain notoriety from athletic success, yet these student athletes must compete in the

classroom with students who are not athletes. Furthermore, Rich said that some student athletes are successful academically and athletically without intervention, but many require academic support in order to succeed.

The identity of the student athlete is shaped by the world around him. The feedback received either as a student or as an athlete will determine the identity chosen. Most student athletes regard themselves as an athlete first thereby neglecting the responsibilities needed to be a successful student. Researchers in the field term this "identity foreclosure" (Keene, 2000, p. 21). Student athletes foreclose on their identity because they believe they are going to play sports professionally and choose not to explore other options. Additionally, the athletic system promotes conformity and requires much of the student athlete's time and energy. Their attention is focused where they get the greatest feedback and where they believe the rewards are greater.

Role theory and, in particular, role conflict exists whenever a person must fill two or more roles with conflicting expectations. Hurley (1993) suggested that "within the term 'student-athlete' lies an implicit combination of two competing, perhaps incompatible roles"(p. 34). Researchers Simons, Van Rheenen, and Covington (1999) pointed out that student athletes are required to devote numerous hours to practice when their sport is in season. These same student athletes are forced to miss classes for school-sanctioned athletic events and to handle the fatigue and injuries that result. These factors work against the academic success of student athletes. Combine that with the fact that some student athletes are under prepared academically for college and resentment builds. The student athlete may feel he is being used by the school for his athletic ability and abandoned academically.

Isolation is another issue facing the academic development of student athletes. Many student athletes spend much of their time with other student athletes. They often live together

and take the same classes in addition to practicing and playing together. Schedule demands contribute to this issue by limiting the opportunities the student athlete has to establish relationships with nonathletes. Coakley (2001) explained that they take courses needed to stay eligible and/or to accommodate practice and game schedules. After taking a series of uninteresting courses and struggling with others, the student athlete gradually detaches from the academic side of college life.

The issue of role conflict surfaces again in regard to social demands on student athletes. Hurley points out the student athletes often perceive themselves to be isolated socially. This is especially true for athletes who live and eat together. In addition, when time allows, student athletes may find that conversations with nonathletes may center on activities that are "not part of the athlete's frame of reference" (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001, p. 38). Hence, the student athletes' perceptions of social isolation are reinforced.

Etzel, Ferrante, and Pinkney (1996) observed that student athletes sometimes project a macho, tough guy attitude. This is an acquired attitude that has developed because athletes are believed to be tough and that tough people just "suck it up" or "tough it out"(p. 16). As a result student athletes often are reluctant to seek support services when they need help. In addition, student athletes may believe that if they put forth enough effort and perform well athletically, they will succeed academically as well. This false sense of self-reliance can lead to academic problems for the student athlete. The same researchers also point out that student athletes often believe that only the athletic department, coaches, and staff understand them. Coaches and athletic departments that discourage their athletes from seeking support services available on campuses have fostered this myth. The prevailing attitude of the athletic departments is that they can take care of their own problems. It does little to project a positive image of athletic

departments nor does it provide student athletes with the help they may need. As a result, the perception of isolation is reinforced.

Hewitt's (2002) study identified two predictors of academic success based on the student athlete's experience once he arrives on campus. The first is based on the student athletes' perceptions of their academic programs. Their success is founded on whether or not the academic programs appealed to them. The second predictor is the amount of interaction the student athletes have with faculty outside of class. Hewitt quoted studies that showed "informal nonclassroom student-faculty interactions have been empirically linked with improved persistence, college satisfaction, and academic achievement" (p.24). Gibson and Creamer (1987) support this by stating, "Student attitudes toward study and academic support systems developed after enrollment and were related to the amount and consistency of academic encouragement given by college employees" (p. 48).

Unfortunately, many faculty hold the perception that student athletes have no intention of being students, and therefore, they do not spend time with the student athletes. Rich (2001) suggested that the student athletes who skip class, fall asleep in class, or cheat on exams or quizzes do harm to their fellow athletes. Faculty form preconceived notions of the behavior of student athletes based on the actions of a few. As a result, faculty apply this perception to all student athletes even though many may perform well academically.

There are many myths and realities that surround the life of a student athlete. Many people think that student athletes are a privileged group in the academic and personal areas. This group is privy to funding that is typically unavailable to nonathletes and often has a strong backing from the community. When accommodations, such as early registration, special tutoring and study groups are made to address the unique demands on student athletes, they are

considered undeserved special privileges by faculty as well as other students (Simons, Van Rheenen, & Covington, 1999).

Others view student athletes as *dumb jocks*. Rich (2001) explained that traditional college students build reputations by relying on academic skills, and they see college athletes as campus celebrities and not as competition in the classroom. Funk (2000) and Valentine and Taub (1999) pointed out that the *dumb jock* stigma has historically been a common perception of student athletes. *The Sporting News* ("Sham," 1989) reported that academic favors were given to athletes who participated in the sports providing financial gain to the institution. The athletes were guaranteed academic success for their athletic success. Furthermore, academic success was equated to receiving enough credits to remain eligible with no thought given to a curriculum of study or graduation requirements. On one hand, the student athletes are cheered for their athletic success, while on the other hand, they are resented for their privileges. Ericson and NAFCAR (as cited in Funk, 2000) stated that "institutionalized academic fraud" (¶ 11) does little to dispel the *dumb jock* stigma. According to Funk, enrolling athletes in courses proven to be less challenging academically, choosing instructors who are known to be "friendly to the athletic department" (¶ 11), grouping athletes in certain majors, the ongoing process of registering and withdrawing from classes, grade changes, and seniors without declared majors are examples of academic fraud as perpetuated by institutions of higher education. All of these practices contribute to negative perceptions of student athletes. Clark and Parette (2002) noted that the *dumb jock* stereotype is perpetuated by teachers who believe that student athletes have limited abilities. The faculty patronize them by assigning unchallenging tasks, giving excessive praise for a mediocre performance, and repeatedly offering unsolicited help.

Additional pressures come from the coaches. The coaches have high expectations of student athletes and dominate their time with practices, film review sessions, team meetings, and actual games (Hewitt, 2002). Student athletes, in turn, feel they owe their coaches their undivided attention in return for the coaches making it possible for them to go to college. According to Coakley (2001), many student athletes find it necessary to take easy courses and less challenging majors if they are to meet the coach's expectations on the playing field. Coakley noted that "fatigue, the pressure of games, and limited time" kept them from becoming seriously involved in academic life (p. 428). Hewitt supported this by adding that too many times the student athletes were steered away from a particular academic choice because it was too demanding, too risky, and too likely that the student athlete would lose his eligibility.

At the forefront of a college coach's agenda is keeping his athletes eligible to play. The NCAA and the NJCAA have requirements as to the number of credits a student athlete must complete as well as minimum GPA requirements for eligibility. Zingg (as cited in Underwood, 1984) reported that there is evidence of coaches' emphasis on "keeping the student athlete eligible for his sport rather than helping him graduate from the institution with marketable academic skills" (p 104). In keeping with this philosophy, athletic departments find many creative ways to allow their athletes to remain eligible. Funk (1995) gave details of a coach "whose team included assistant coaches and ineligible players using assumed names" (p. 8). Funk also reported that coaches' maneuverings to allow players to remain eligible are long standing. When George Gipp was expelled from Notre Dame in 1919 for poor grades, Coach Knute Rockne justified allowing him to reenter school and play football when he passed a set of oral examinations. Fashioning degree programs and courses for athletes is a recognized practice (Ericson, 1993).

Many coaches believe graduation need not be a goal of student athletes. Any academic improvement, however small, student athletes make is justification for recruiting them (Ericson, 1993). During the trial *Kemp v. University of Georgia*, the university's defense attorney said, "We may not be able to make university students out of them. But maybe they can work in the post office rather than as garbage men when they get through with their athletic careers" (Ericson, 1993, p. 47). Because of this practice, big time sports programs do not graduate many athletes (Cramer, 1986). Purdy, Eitzen, and Hufnagel (1982) indicated that student athletes graduated at a lower rate than the general student population.

College and university rules on admission are routinely broken by coaches and administration who allow academically unqualified student athletes to register (Cramer, 1986). The results of a study by Purdy, Eitzen, and Hufnagel (1982) showed that student athletes were consistently less prepared for college than non-athletes. This was documented by high school GPAs, SAT, and ACT scores. Scholarship athletes were less prepared than partial or non-scholarship athletes. Athletes who have been given scholarships are under a great deal of pressure. "Full scholarship athletes have in a sense become employees of the university" (p. 445). When the coach demands athletic training and practice, academics must take second place. Athletes may also have unrealistic expectations about their future in sports and thus submit to the coach's requirements, thereby placing less emphasis on academics than on sports.

Administration plays a defining role in the success of the college's student athletes, too, according to Stokes (1979). Direct involvement on their part greatly influences the retention and academic success of the student athlete. They have the responsibility of instituting and maintaining programs that contribute to the educational goals of the student athlete. Many community college presidents may have felt the problems at their institutions "were not as great

or had not received as much media attention as those revealed in big-time college and university programs" (p. 431). Funds are needed to run the programs essential for the academic support of student athletes and are often the first items cut from the budget. The rationale behind this move is that the money is diverted to serve the greater student population instead of a small select group such as the athletes.

In summary the probable causes for the lack of academic success and retention among student athletes are attributed to the following: (1) academic preparation prior to college, (2) perception by others and by the student athletes, (3) inadequate advisement, (4) time demands, (5) physical demands, (6) academic demands, (7) isolation, (8) inadequate support services, and (9) athletic department expectations.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

A review of the literature provides many solutions to the problem of improving academic success and retention among student athletes. The solutions uncovered in the search conducted by the researchers recounted here revealed that educational development plans, progress reports, life skills courses, orientation, study groups, specific academic advisement, tutoring, career planning, and mentoring are all critical in meeting the needs of student athletes. An analysis of each strategy is presented next with particular attention to the research supporting the three interventions chosen by the research team. The interventions selected include completion of educational development plans, examination of students' progress reports, and implementation of enrollment of all incoming freshman student athletes in a life skills course designed specifically for them.

Educational Development Plan

An educational development plan (EDP) provides many benefits. The plan creates a paper trail that will follow the student athlete throughout his freshman year documenting participation in the academic process. The EDP also provides a measure of accountability for all parties involved because a signature is required as each section is completed. In addition to

requiring a life skills course early in the student athlete's stay at college, it is advantageous for him to have clear academic goals. Valentine and Taub (1999) stated that with the help of an academic advisor, the student athlete should plan his educational path. A definite plan of study should be created that takes into consideration the athlete's schedule. Off-season semesters should include the more rigorous courses, and support services such as tutoring should be discussed. Rich (2001) supported this idea by stating that counselors and student athletes must establish an individualized structured plan that focuses on study skills and the attainment of better grades. Other researchers concurred and suggested that the identification of "at risk" student athletes must occur early in their college experience in order for them to be successful (Lederman, 1983; Martin, 1999; Walter & Smith, 1986; Whitner & Myers, 1986).

Progress Reports

Monitoring a student athlete's academic progress on a regular basis is a preferred method that emerged from the literature review. Although there are several variations on this theme, the objective is always the same. Progress reports allow the faculty, administration, and the athletic department to closely observe the academic standing and class attendance of the student athlete. Progress reports serve as an early warning system alerting the student athlete and the athletic department to issues that could potentially cost the student athlete his eligibility and scholarship. According to Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001) institutions should regularly send progress reports to faculty requesting the current grades and attendance records of student athletes. Carodine, et al. observed further that this strategy is critical to providing the information needed to implement appropriate intervention strategies, such as assigning a tutor. Researchers varied on the frequency of the reports ranging from twice a semester to weekly (Rankin, 2000). Most

agreed that progress reports should be completed by faculty and reviewed by an academic advisor along with the athletic department including the coach.

Clark and Parette (2002) offered another view of progress reports. These authors explained a system in which student athletes complete a weekly self-report. They suggested that self-reporting gathers information more quickly regarding grades received, assignments due, and requests for academic assistance. The reports are due more frequently and failure to complete and return the reports usually results in penalties in the athletic area. The advantage to this method is that responsibility for completion is placed directly with student athletes and, as a result, may influence their acceptance of the academic process. Lederman (1988) reported a similar system for monitoring students' progress. Weekly, student athletes must complete and sign a report on their attendance. This report is then submitted to their academic counselor. The counselor checks to ensure accuracy and faculty members are encouraged to call and report any student absences. In addition, academic progress is monitored four times during a semester, when the student athlete asks each of his instructors to complete a report. By having student athletes experience this process, Lederman believed they will become more self-reliant.

Life Skills Course

As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, student athletes at the target community college are not adequately prepared to handle the rigors of both academic and athletic life. A review of the literature revealed a trend towards designing and implementing courses as well as seminars to help student athletes balance their academic and athletic needs. According to Watt and Moore (2001), these types of activities should emphasize time management, career development, study skills, and resourcefulness. Enabling student athletes to take responsibility for their own decisions will benefit them both in the present and after college. Walt and Moore stressed further

the need to hold activities early in the fall semester for all freshmen and transfer student athletes. Walter and Smith (1986) reported a program where freshmen student athletes are required to take a workshop similar to that designed by Watt and Moore. Students take the workshop for six weeks at the beginning of their first semester. Topics covered include speed reading, note-taking, self-management training, test preparation, test-taking and time management. In addition, goal setting and life skills are discussed.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2002) currently sponsors CHAMPS/Life Skills Programs across campuses nationwide. CHAMPS is an acronym for *Challenging Athletic Minds for Personal Success* and was established with the intent of enhancing student athletes' post-secondary experiences. The goal of the program is to help student athletes complete a college degree while assisting them with life skills. The organization's five commitment statements include (1) support for academic progress, (2) develop athletic programs dedicated to the well-being of the student athlete, (3) encourage students' personal growth and development, (4) promote attainment of career goals, and (5) engage student athletes in community service. CHAMPS/Life Skills is based on the premise that student athletes have difficulty accessing services that are available to them on campus. Through this program, the NCAA provides athletic departments with resources and direction to help student athletes have a more meaningful collegiate experience (Clark & Parette, 2002). The National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) does not have a similar program in place at this time (per phone call August 2, 2002).

Many examples of courses designed to meet the mission of the commitment statements were presented in the literature. Ohio State University requires all freshmen student athletes to enroll in a one-credit-hour survey course designed to introduce them to the university rules,

procedures, and opportunities. Other topics included are instruction on study skills, career planning, time management, involvement in organizations, and establishment of goals and priorities. The program also provides student athletes with an awareness of positive and negative perceptions that the university community has of them (Tootle & Rinsma, 1980). Denson (1994) described a freshman seminar course taught by the College of Physical Education at the University of Delaware. The course is divided into three clusters: (1) academic navigation focusing on time management, study skills, and test taking strategies; (2) career development; and (3) personal and social issues.

Orientation

Orientation sessions are yet another tool to be used to promote retention and graduation among student athletes. Orientation programs are implemented on campuses as a means to acquaint students with the inner workings of the school regarding its facilities, activities, policies, and regulations. In addition, student athletes need information concerning issues directly related to athletic rules and regulations such as eligibility. The purpose of the orientation process is to ease students' transition into a more collegiate environment. Tootle and Rinsma (1980) illustrated that sessions conducted jointly with representatives from the athletic and academic sides of the college are most effective as they serve to reinforce the commitment and communication between the two areas. Hill, Burch-Ragan and Yates (2001) concurred that a thorough orientation program for student athletes can reduce the need for intervention. These authors stated, "Student athletes must be well informed about the rewards of responsible behavior and the consequences associated with inappropriate choices" (p. 7). If student athletes understand the eligibility requirements, athletic department rules, and the school's code of conduct, then the responsibility for success rests on the shoulders of student athletes.

Another point of view concerning orientation came from Gerdy and Tinto (as cited in Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). These authors concurred that orientation is one way of increasing the academic success of student athletes. However, they believed student athletes should not be singled out; rather they should experience the same orientation as other freshmen. It was Gerdy and Tinto's belief that mainstreaming student athletes from the beginning of their program promotes retention and ultimately graduation.

Study Groups

Perhaps the most prevalent vehicle for academic support student athletes is a required study hall. Attendance requirements at these study halls vary by institution, but Underwood (1984) suggested two hours per night at least three nights per week. Both Ruscella (1993) and Underwood (1984) emphasized that study halls should operate throughout the academic year and that attendance should be required for all athletes during the year, not just during the playing season.

Harney, Brigham and Sanders (1986) reported that the implementation of a Freshman Athlete Scholastic Training (FAST) program focusing on monitoring classroom attendance, note-taking, and study skills increased student athletes' GPAs. Students in the FAST program were required to attend a group study session at a decreasing rate as they demonstrated good classroom attendance, effective note-taking, and on-time completion of assignments. Students in the FAST group showed a significantly higher GPA than those who attended a regular study group with no emphasis on study skills and those who did not attend a required study group. Terry (1990) concurred that there is little conclusive evidence that a traditional study group where only attendance is monitored has a significant influence on increasing the academic performance of student athletes.

Academic Advisement

Academic and career counseling can play a positive role in the success of a student athlete. Such counseling is a great responsibility and goes beyond the scope of most duties and expertise of many coaches (Underwood, 1984). Underwood suggested further that academic advising of student athletes be conducted by knowledgeable counselors who understand both the college and athletic eligibility requirements. These counselors would then be able to monitor the athlete's progress toward a career goal.

Athletic support staff should work in conjunction with college major and faculty advisors to ensure that student athletes are enrolling in courses that will lead toward the completion of their designated degree programs (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). The NCAA requires student athletes to meet with their major advisors and athletic counselors during the registration period. The major advisor also approves the preliminary schedule provided by the athletic counselor. The registrar then verifies that the credit hours were completed and are admissible toward the student athlete's designated degree program.

All freshmen student athletes entering Ohio State University are assigned a specific academic advisor who provides assistance in schedule planning, career counseling, and other academic concerns, and who is also a specialist on athletic eligibility issues. The counselor helps the student athlete in choosing an appropriate field of study, developing a positive attitude toward academics, and making a successful transition from high school to college (Tootle & Rinsma, 1980).

Tutoring

In an address delivered to the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. on January 23, 2001, Miles Brand, President of Indiana University, promoted an increase in the involvement of

college administration, particularly presidents in intercollegiate athletics. He emphasized not only a need for better pre-college preparation of students, but also the need for colleges to make a fundamental commitment toward improving the academic mission of the institution for all students including athletes. This commitment extends through the administration to the athletic director who "must be committed to the primacy of academics despite the daily pressure from the athletic community and boosters" (¶ 29). Brand proposed that one way to accomplish this goal is to expand the academic support services a college provides to all students. By having services such as tutoring available, student athletes would be helped socially as well as academically. In essence, the isolation that would occur in an athletes-only tutoring situation would be relieved.

Career Development

Sandeen's study (as cited in Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001) explained that the purpose of a career development program is to help student athletes learn about their interests and skills while developing plans that fit both their career and personal needs. The career program often includes career assessment, planning, experiential education, co-ops, internships, and placement services. The focus is more on exploration and goal setting.

Mentoring

Mentoring programs are also a very important strategy for student athlete success. Meecham's study (as cited in Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001) suggested that the mentor's main role is to help student athletes' practice, study, and time management skills. Student athletes bring all course syllabi to the mentor and together they review due dates for assignments and tests and develop a study schedule. The mentor and athlete meet once a week to evaluate the student's progress.

Project Objective and Processes

After analyzing professional literature and site-based factors, the researchers arrived at the following objective:

As a result of completing educational development plans, enrolling in Strategies for College (SFC 1000), and monitoring progress reports during the period of August through December 2002, the student athletes at the target community college will exhibit improved academic success and retention as measured by document analysis, surveys, and interviews.

In order to accomplish the project objectives, the following processes are needed:

1. Gather preliminary data
2. Implement interventions
   A. Implement educational development plan
   B. Enroll participants in Strategies for College (SFC 1000)
   C. Monitor progress reports
3. Assess project

Project Action Plan

Gather preliminary data

- Analysis of student records August 1 – 15, 2002

  Examine records for GPAs, withdrawals, and failures

  Collect baseline data for comparison

- Review of Student Athlete Success Committee findings August 1 – 15, 2002
- Conduct administrator interviews August 1 – 15, 2002 to investigate administrators' perceptions of student athletes

- Distribution of surveys August 2002

  Student Athlete Survey (Form A) at the athlete orientation

  Faculty, Counselors, and Coaches Survey at the faculty in-service and coaches meeting

Implement Educational Development Plan August 2002

- Section 1 completed by coach at time of athlete commitment to the team (prior to Fall semester 2002)
- Section 2 completed by Assessment Center upon completion of placement testing August, 2002
- Section 3 completed by counselor at counseling appointment to schedule classes August, 2002
- Section 4 completed by Strategies for College (SFC 1000) instructor upon completion of the course, December, 2002
- Section 5 completed by Special Populations Coordinator August – December, 2002 to determine if accommodations are needed
- Section 6 completed by Coordinator of Academic Success January, 2003 to continue the process of monitoring participants for completion of first semester, to determine if additional advisement is needed and to determine athletic eligibility for Spring semester 2003

Enroll participants in Strategies for College (SFC 1000) August 2002

- Monitor participation August - December 2002
- Monitor success (final course grade) December 2002

Monitor Progress Reports

- Student athletes pick up progress reports from and return them to the athletic office every three weeks, September – December, 2002
- Researchers and Coordinator for Academic Success begin review of progress reports (including attendance and grades) for a three-week period beginning September – December, 2002
- Researchers review faculty and staff recommendations for academic assistance among student athletes for a three-week period beginning September – December, 2002
- Researchers follow-up student service representatives to determine whether or not student athletes sought the academic assistance recommended by faculty and staff

Assess project

- Student Athlete Survey (Form B) December, 2002 to compare end of semester perceptions with the beginning of semester perceptions
- Final analysis of student records January 2003

  To compare to baseline data

  To evaluate success of interventions

  To make recommendations for future assistance

Methods of Assessment

The success of the interventions was assessed by the researchers' documentation of results of student athlete surveys and a final analysis of student records to compare to baseline data. Interventions were assessed using document analysis, surveys, and interviews. Document analysis involved collecting baseline data to make comparisons both before and after

interventions. Participants also received two surveys (Appendices B and C) that were designed to gather data on their perceptions of dual roles as students and athletes. The surveys were administered in two forms. Form A was administered at the beginning of the study and Form B was provided at the end of fall semester. In addition, a survey was distributed to faculty, counselors, and coaches investigating their perceptions of student athletes and support of athletic programs. Finally, interviews were used to collect data on administrators' attitudes and perceptions of student athletes and the athletic program.

The *Student Athlete Survey* was designed to investigate participants' perceptions of their role as a student and an athlete. The survey was administered in two forms: Form A and Form B. Form A included ten items focused on personal study habits, priorities, and academic motivation. The three researchers administered the survey to 64 participants at the target community college. The surveys were distributed to student athletes during a fall semester orientation. Researchers provided a brief overview of the project and instructions for participants to place the completed surveys in a sealed box at the end of the session. Form B (Appendix E) contained 12 items, repeating items from Form A, then asking participants to evaluate the interventions. Form B was completed by participants in December. Participants, whose sports were currently practicing, were asked to complete Form B return it to the researchers via campus mail. Student athletes whose sports were not practicing were contacted in person or by mail. In this situation, participants were asked to complete the survey and return in it the addressed envelop provided using campus mail.

The purpose of the survey was to investigate faculty, counselors', and coaches' perceptions about interactions with student athletes and support of athletic programs. The three researchers administered the eleven-item survey to 65 faculty members (including full and part-

time instructors), six counselors, and six coaches in August. The coaches were asked to complete the surveys during their first staff meeting. The survey was distributed to faculty at the opening day in-service. Surveys were distributed to the counseling staff through key individuals in the department. Researchers provided faculty, counselors, and coaches a brief overview of the project.

The administrator interview was designed to investigate the management's perceptions of student athletes. The three researchers conducted eleven interviews in 20-minute sessions two weeks prior to the beginning of the fall semester. One researcher asked the questions while another took notes of the responses with the permission of the participant.

Anonymity was maintained during the study by asking participants to omit any references to names, and administrators were assured that all statements would be kept confidential. Researchers retained the completed surveys, interview notes, and signed consent forms in a locked cabinet.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of the project was to improve the academic success and retention of student athletes at the target community college. The implementation of educational development plans, enrollment in a life skills course designed specifically for college student athletes, and examination of progress reports were selected to affect the desired changes.

Educational development plans, a copy of which can be found in Appendix F, were designed to monitor freshmen student athletes' progression from commitment to their chosen team(s) to completion of the first semester. The plan's purpose was to monitor participants' completion of the first semester, to determine if additional advisement was needed, and to determine athletic eligibility for spring semester 2003. The plan, consisting of six sections, was to have originated with the coach and follow the student athletes through the enrollment process. Other sections required information from assessment, counseling, life skills instructor, special populations coordinator and the academic success coordinator in the athletic department. Due to miscommunication, the educational development plans were not started at the time of the student athletes' commitment, which was a deviation from the original action plan. The plans were started after the semester began and were completed as a group instead of individually. As a

result, completion of the plans required a major time commitment from the people involved. In addition, some information from the life skills course was no longer available (e.g. individual learning styles of student athletes).

All incoming freshmen student athletes were required to enroll in a life skills course. This course involved college orientation and was designed to assist student athletes in obtaining the skills and services needed to reach their educational objectives. The purpose of the course was to empower student athletes to take responsibility for their own decisions and to provide strategies that will help them balance both academics and athletics. Topics presented included time management strategies, student services available on campus, learning style research and application, and study and test-taking skills.

Two sections designed specifically for college student athletes were offered one week prior to the beginning of the fall semester. However, a minimal number of students who enrolled late did not take the class at this time. When the researchers visited the classes to administer surveys, they noted the demeanor of the two classes was markedly different. One class was open and curious, while the other class was withdrawn and sullen. The classes did not have equal enrollment and the sports teams were not equally represented in each class.

The Student Athlete Academic Success Committee in conjunction with the athletic department designed a progress report form for the purpose of monitoring the student athletes' academic progress. A copy of this form can be found in Appendix G. The committee determined there would be 5 reporting periods—the weeks of August 26, 2002; September 16, 2002; October 7, 2002; October 28, 2002; and November 18, 2002. All student athletes were instructed by their coaches to pick up a folder containing progress report forms for each of their classes. Student athletes had one week (Monday – Friday) to meet with instructors and to have them sign

the reports. At the end of the week, the folder was to be returned to the academic success coordinator in the athletic department. Coaches then had three days to review the reports and sign them.

The researchers examined the reports after the coaches had time to review and sign them. Researchers observed and noted the following information listed on the reports:

- Instructor's and coach's signatures present
- Number of unexcused absences indicated
- Grade circled
- Tutoring recommended
- Coach and instructor comments

The number of reports turned in was checked against a copy of the student athlete's current schedule to determine that all reports had been returned.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

The pre-intervention survey was given to freshmen student athletes at the beginning of the semester to gage their perceptions of themselves as college students. A post-intervention survey (Form B), a copy of which can be found in Appendix E, was given at the end of the semester to measure whether or not their perceptions had changed. Figure 4.1 shows a marked change in perceptions in all areas except attendance. Student athletes appreciated the importance of class attendance as much at the end of the semester as at the beginning. Other significant changes in perceptions were shown in a 36% increase in value of study habits and an 18% increase in the use of tutoring. Student athletes realized the necessity of good study habits and the value of tutoring. Response to the post-intervention survey indicated student athletes' perceptions of themselves as capable students increased by 10%. In addition, the realization that

they would have a harder time academically that the average college student increased by 9%. This realization is demonstrated by a 24% increase in agreement with the statement, "I worked as hard academically as I did athletically." Furthermore, student athletes showed an improvement of 27% in their ability to balance school, study, practice, work and a social life. The only item that showed a decrease (-12%) was in whether or not student athletes planned to graduate from the target school. This decrease may be attributed to student athletes' increased awareness of academic requirements for an associate degree. Most respondents indicated their desire to pursue degrees from a four-year institution and noted that they would transfer following their second year without actually attaining a degree from the target community college.

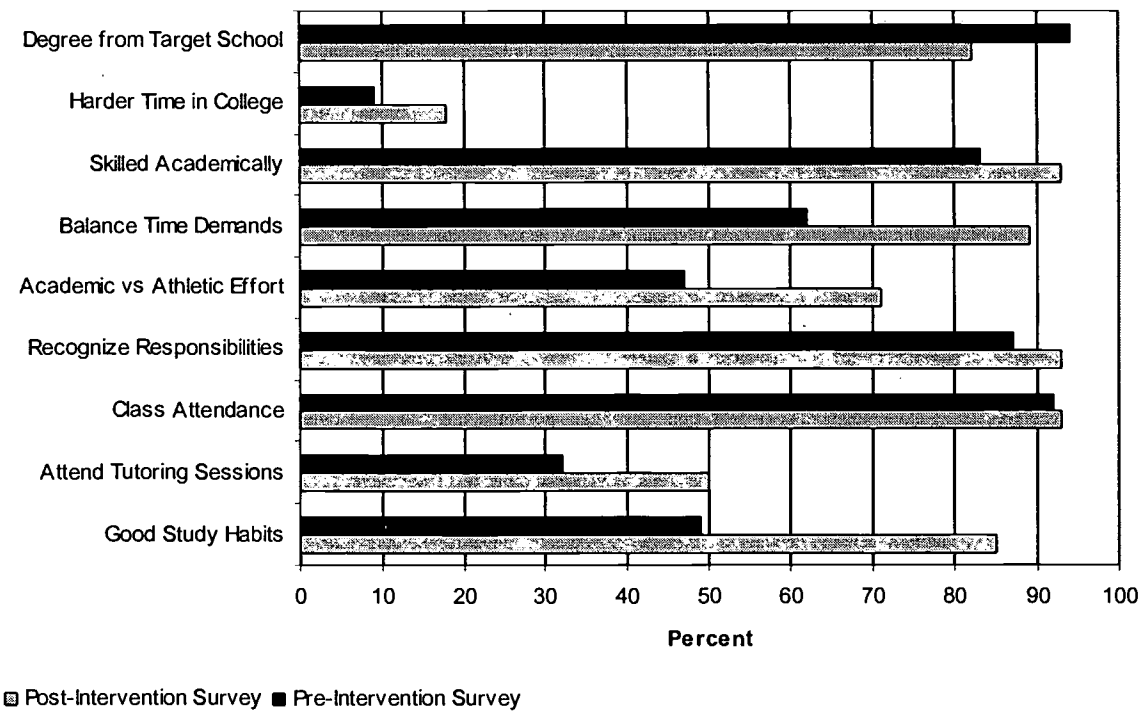

Figure 4.1 Comparisons of pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys.

Educational Development Plans

The educational development plans were designed to provide a paper trail to ensure that our student athletes have every opportunity for success. The researchers chose this intervention because educational development plans were recommended and approved by the Student Athlete Success Committee. The implementation did not go as planned; consequently, individual attention could not be given to the athletes. Interest in data generated by these reports waned quickly, and no members of the college community, except for the researchers, pursued follow-up.

Life Skills Course

The requirement of enrollment in a life skills course was chosen as an intervention in order to provide student athletes with strategies for success in college. Support for this intervention at the target community college existed among faculty, administration and coaches. Figure 4.2 depicts the success of student athletes in this course.

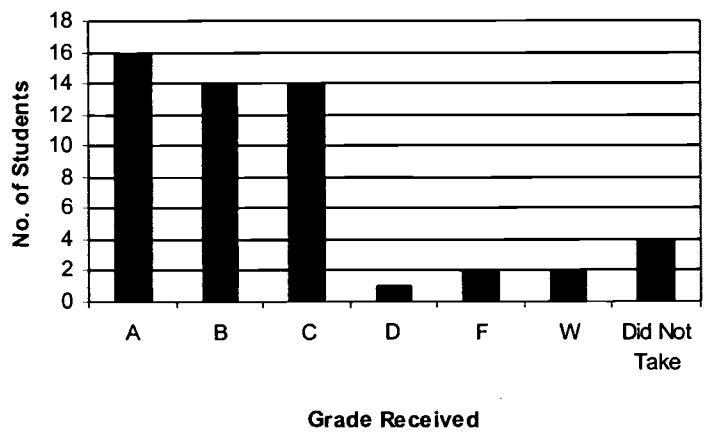

Figure 4.2 Grades for life skills course.

Data analysis of existing school records of the freshmen student athletes showed that 85% (n = 53) received a grade of A, B, or C in the life skills course. A small number of the athletes (n = 4)

did not take the course apparently due to scheduling conflicts or late enrollment. Of the student athletes participating in the study who returned the post-intervention survey (n = 28), all but two agreed that they have a better understanding of the responsibilities of being a college student now than they did at the beginning of the semester. However, reaction to the value of the life skills course was mixed. More than half, 61% (n = 17), agreed that the course helped them to realize the expectations of a college student. The researchers deduced that the experience of a semester in college coupled with enrollment in a life skills course provided student athletes with a better understanding of the responsibilities of college life.

Progress Reports

In order to assess progress reports, researchers reviewed the reports after the coaches had time to review and sign them. A form containing columns for each section of the progress report was devised to use as a checklist during the review process. A copy of this form can be found in Appendix H.

Instructors' signatures. The majority of progress reports contained the necessary instructors' signatures; however, each reporting period had occurrences of reports turned in with no signature from the instructors. Figure 4.3 shows the number of reports without signatures for each reporting period. The researchers noted that the number of reports without signatures increased as the semester progressed. Some instructors' signatures were hard to read and because the instructor's name was not printed on the sheet, the researchers had to find the student athlete's schedule in order to determine the name of the instructor. Instructors of online courses did not have an opportunity to sign the progress report; therefore, neither the student athletes nor the athletic department received any feedback on the student athlete's progress.

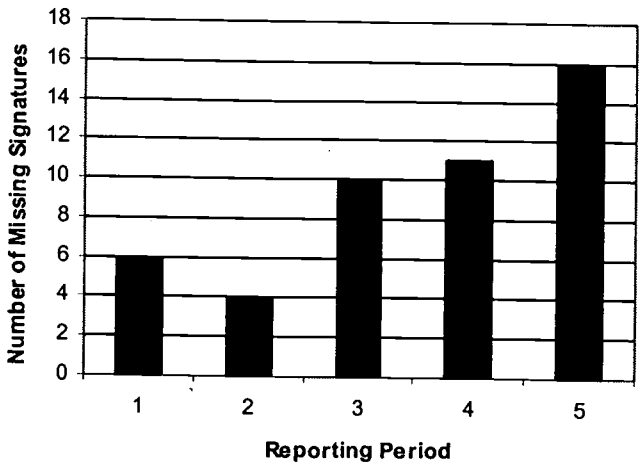

Figure 4.3 Number of missing instructor signatures.

Actual current grade. Reporting of actual current grade was inconsistent on the progress reports. The majority of instructors indicated a letter grade; however, Figure 4.4 shows the responses that indicated Unable to Determine, Pass/Fail, or were left blank. The Unable to Determine in Period 1 is understandably high because the report was distributed the second week of the semester. Many instructors had not yet given graded work. However, instructors continued to choose the Unable to Determine option throughout the semester. The form contained no directions requiring instructors to indicate a letter grade in classes where such grades are given. As a result, an accurate picture of the student athlete's progress was not available. Furthermore, the researchers noted that as the number of missing instructors' signatures increased (see Figure 4.3), the number of blank grade responses also increased.

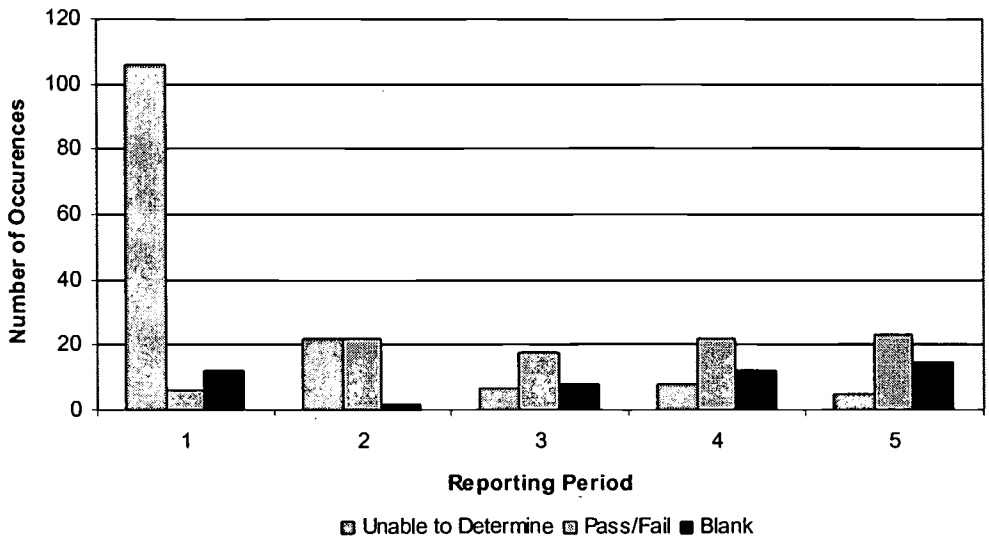

Figure 4.4 Actual current grade.

Unexcused absences. The target community college leaves the attendance policy to the discretion of the instructor. The column heading on the progress report form was "Total # of Unexcused Absences." Consequently, it was not clear if this was the number of unexcused absences for the reporting period or a cumulative total for the semester to date. This was evident by the number of absences reported and the comments made by the instructors regarding this matter. Still others left the column blank making it unclear to the researchers if the blank meant there were no unexcused absences or that they were just not recorded on the form.

Recommend tutor. According to the progress reports, 22 student athletes were recommended at least once to seek tutoring. Figure 4.5 shows the number who sought tutoring based on recommendation, those who did not, and the number who received a grade of C or better in the class for which they were recommended. Attending peer tutoring sessions had a direct effect on the student athletes' grades in that 75% of the participants who sought tutoring received a grade of C or better in the class in which they were tutored. Conversely, only 36% of

the participants who chose not to attend tutoring received grades of C or better in the recommended course. Evidence shows that peer tutoring has a positive effect on grades.

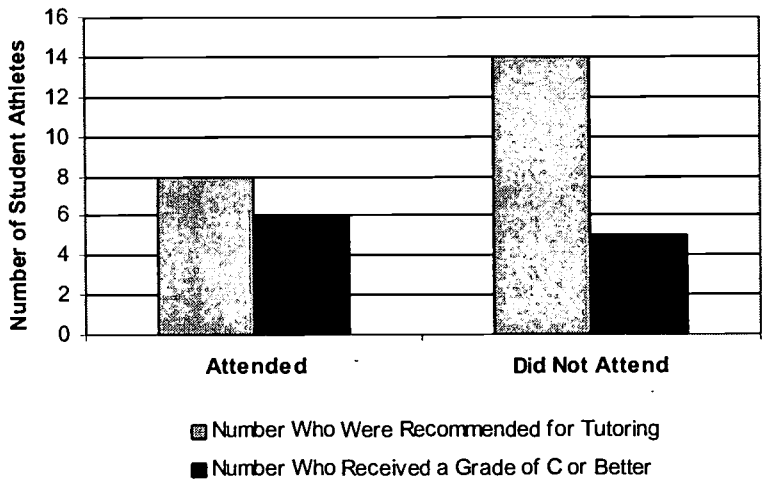

Figure 4.5 Grade comparison of participants who attended tutoring to those who did not.

Instructor's comments. Instructors who completed this column made comments regarding the student athlete's progress in class. It was used as a message to the student athlete as well as the coach indicating the student athlete's standing in the class. There were many positive comments as well as many constructive comments regarding the student athlete's class performance. However, many instructors chose to leave the comment section blank. In the post-intervention survey, the student athletes agreed that progress reports helped them monitor their academic growth. This shows that student athletes appreciated the feedback generated by the progress report.

Coach's signatures and comments. Coaches were attentive to reviewing the progress reports and signing them in a timely manner. The only exception was when the coach's season was over and he was no longer on campus. In this situation, the academic success coordinator signed for the coach. For the most part, the coaches' comment section was left blank.

The researchers found the progress reports to be an effective intervention because they

- gave the student athletes periodic feedback on their academic progress
- gave the coaches immediate feedback about attendance and academic progress allowing them to monitor eligibility
- provided a means for faculty to recommend tutoring
- facilitated personal interaction between instructor and student.

In the post-intervention survey student athletes overwhelmingly agreed that progress reports were useful. Figure 4.6 illustrates 86% (n = 24) of the student athletes found the reports helpful in monitoring their academic growth.

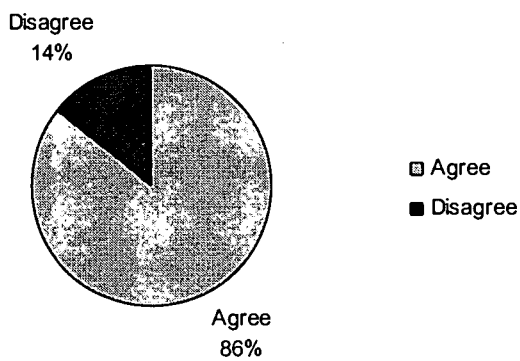

Figure 4.6 Rating of the usefulness of progress reports by student athletes.

Document Analysis

In reviewing transcripts for the fall semester, data was retrieved regarding hours attempted and completed as well as the GPA. Of the 869 hours attempted by student athletes, 82% (n = 715) were completed. Table 4.1 illustrates that 17% (n = 146) of the hours attempted resulted in an F (failure) or a W (withdraw) on the transcript for the semester. A further analysis

revealed that 17% (n = 151) of the hours attempted by the student athletes were in developmental education courses (e.g. Pre-Algebra, Basic Algebra, Basic Composition, and Basic Reading).

Table 4.1

Analysis of Freshmen Student Athlete Records for Fall 2002 by Sport

Sport	Total Hours Attempted	Total Hours Completed	Developmental Education Hours	Hours Withdrawn	Hours Failed	Team Average GPA
Womens Basketball	91	72	29	4	10	2.356
Womens Tennis	49	47	0	2	0	2.662
Softball	64	59	9	5	0	2.630
Volleyball	100	100	8	0	0	2.638
Mens Tennis	100	85	3	15	0	2.872
Golf	105	86	16	17	2	3.157
Baseball	208	151	38	31	26	2.251
Mens Basketball	152	115	48	13	21	2.248
Total	869	715	151	87	59	2.602

N = 53

In comparing the transcript results of freshmen student athletes from Fall 2001 to Fall 2002, significant changes were noted. There was a 4% drop in the number of completed hours as well as a 3% increase in the hours resulting in F or W. The comparison of average GPAs showed an increase of 8%. Analysis of the data revealed that more student athletes chose to withdraw from the class as opposed to failing it. As a result, the GPAs are higher.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of data, academic success of student athletes at the target community college remained relatively unchanged. However, student athletes' perceptions of themselves as students improved markedly. Participants seemed to accept more responsibility

for their learning and showed improved attitudes toward academic achievement. Completion of a life skills class, information obtained from progress reports, and the experience of one semester in college all combined to help them realize that being a student is as important as being an athlete.

The researchers recommend several modifications when pursuing a project of this type. When an intervention is chosen that requires cooperation from a number of individuals, it is important that all parties believe in the intervention. It is essential the intervention is an agreed upon plan of action and not an imposition. In retrospect, the researchers believe that educational development plans may have been viewed as an imposition causing this intervention to be ineffective.

To maximize the effectiveness of the life skills class, the researchers recommend the class not be taught in a condensed format, but be spread out over the whole semester. This will give participants a better opportunity to apply the principles discussed in class. Multiple sections of the course should be offered and care should be taken to disperse athletes from any one sport into the various sections. This would provide greater camaraderie among athletes from different sports fostering a stronger bond in the athletic community.

Progress reports proved to be a successful intervention because all parties actively participated in the process. However, the researchers have the following recommendations regarding the use of progress reports. The student athletes' class schedules should be fastened to the folder containing all the reports in order for the academic success coordinator to verify the presence of all report forms. Each report should have the instructor's name typed on it in case the signature is illegible. An electronic version of the form should be available for instructors of online courses. In this action research project, confusion arose over how to record attendance.

The column heading needs to be specific in asking for the number of absences for each reporting period. Furthermore, instructions should be given that the column not be left blank. In the category for current grade, several instructors circled pass or fail rather than indicating a letter grade. The pass/fail option should be reserved for courses that issue only pass/fail grades. The researchers agreed that if they were going to use this intervention again they would field test the form before implementation. Instructors should be introduced to the form and how to use it at the first faculty meeting of the semester.

Another issue surfaced as the researchers analyzed the data from the progress reports. Although it was not an intervention, peer tutoring was an important contributor to the academic success of student athletes. Therefore, the researchers recommend that steps be taken to insure a feedback loop is in place. When athletes are recommended for tutoring, the academic success coordinator should notify both the coach and the peer tutoring coordinator. Furthermore, when student athletes complete tutoring sessions, the academic success coordinator should be notified and he in turn should notify both the coach and the instructor.

The action research project, while in progress, created a climate of concern for student athletes that was evident throughout the campus. The Student Athlete Success Committee met several times during the semester and the academic success coordinator reported on information obtained from the progress reports. Instructors expressed interest in student athletes and the results of the project at faculty forums. The researchers felt implementing the action plan made a difference in the attitudes of the academic and athletic environments of the target community college. Lines of communication were established between the academic and athletic communities in order to close the feedback loop created by the progress reports. It was clearly evident that when the communication cycle was completed, student athletes benefited. However,

there were circumstances where no supplementary action was taken and student athletes suffered as evidenced by the data collected. The process of reviewing literature, formulating an action plan, and implementing interventions was a learning experience for the researchers. As a result, the researchers developed new attitudes about student athletes and the challenges they face.

The researchers believe that most athletes have proven to be responsible students, as shown by the marked improvement of student athletes' perceptions of their academic skills and abilities. The favorable responses can be attributed to implementation of the interventions as indicated in the action plan. Enrollment in a life skills course and the use of progress reports have aided in the growth of the athletes as students. Continued use of these strategies for assisting student athletes should foster continued achievement both on and off the court.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

January 26, 2001 Forum on Student Athletes

Problems	Solutions
• Advised to overload, so they can drop if they need to	
• Enrolled for too many credit hours	
• Balance between class attendance and game/practice attendance	• Schedule games to facilitate classroom, attendance and scheduling
• Lack of opportunity for thorough counseling	• Get students in to counselor early to plan registration
• Late registration	• Group orientation, especially for early signers • Cut off for acceptance of athletes
• Classes needed for majors vs. Classes that will keep them eligible	
• Ethnicity	
• Often away from home for the first time	• Need to orient to college and instill sense of responsibility (for all students)
• Students bring in progress report at last minute	• Send out progress reports via e-mail Set time for conference for progress reports
• Time management	• Three hours a week mandatory study
• Late registration to keep eligibility	• Requirements for students on tuition waivers
• Course schedule conflicting with practice, etc.	• Schedule games to facilitate classroom attendance and scheduling
• Follow up on progress reports	• Set time for conference for progress reports
• Utilize service that we offer	• Mentor program
• Athletes has respect for team and sport, but lees so for academics	• Capitalize on mutual efforts *(i.e.* team-building)
• How does athletics support Community College mission and care functions	
• Students don't know how to balance schedule and time it takes to be successful	• Mentor program
• Lack of clarity *(i.e.* responsibilities of coaches, faculty, etc.)	• Coaches communicate expectations of their athletes to faculty
• Students not aware of eligibility guidelines	
• Negative perception of student athletes by others	
• Lack of recognition for success of student athletes – preconceptions unfair (labeling)	• Appreciate and recognize student efforts
• Don't understand responsibilities of being a college student	• Mentor program • Take SFC 1000 with option for testing out
• Student athletes, especially out of district, come into unfamiliar/alien environment	• Group orientation, especially for early signers • Need to orient to college and instill sense of responsibility
• What comes first – "student" or "athlete"	
• Attendance – lack of	• Apply same expectations that coaches have for practices, etc. to classroom attendance • Put process/guidelines in writing for faculty, coaches and students • Students need to be aware of attendance requirements for each class
• Not uniform reporting on progress • Poor communication between faculty, coaches, and AAS	• Capitalize on aspects of progress reports that work • Standardize progress reporting for sports • Advise students on how to talk with faculty • Coaches communicate expectations of their athletes to faculty

Problems	Solutions
• Preconception that athletes will be poor students	
• Progress reports not filled out accurately (no grades)	• Needs to be follow up on progress report consequences • Access to grades through ThinkWave
• Not enough information *(i.e.* learning styles)	• Take SFC 1000 with option of testing out (required?)
• Are we setting students up for failure (out of district with out enough support) • Task Force Members	• Take SFC 1000 with option of testing out (required?) •

Appendix B

Student Athlete Survey (Form A)

Gender: Male Female Sport: _____

Circle one response for each of the following items.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Study Habits:					
I take good notes.	1	2	3	4	5
I complete assignments on time.	1	2	3	4	5
I prepare for tests in advance.	1	2	3	4	5
I set aside study time.	1	2	3	4	5
2. If course tutoring is made available on campus at no cost, I will attend it regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Regular class attendance is necessary to be successful in college.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I think I understand responsibilities of being a college student.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I work as hard academically as I do athletically.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am able to balance school, study, practice, work, and a social life.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I believe I am as skilled academically as the average community college student.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I expect to have a harder time than most students at this college.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I plan to graduate from this college.	1	2	3	4	5

10. My academic goal is _____

Appendix C

Faculty Survey

Check one: Faculty_____ Counselor_____ Coach_____

Circle one response for each of the following items.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Student athletes exhibit good study skills.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Student athletes seek tutoring when needed.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Student athletes attend class regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Student athletes understand the responsibilities of being college students.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Student athletes are more concerned with athletics than academics.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Student athletes are able to balance school, study, practice, work, and a social life.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Student athletes perform as well academically as nonathletes.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I enjoy my interaction with student athletes.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I support athletic programs.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I have preconceived ideas about the academic abilities of student athletes.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Student athletes expect special consideration.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D

Administrator Interview

1. What are the strengths of the college's athletic program?

2. What are the weaknesses of the college's athletic program?

3. How do you perceive the academic success of student athletes at the college?

4. How do you perceive the retention rate of student athletes at the college?

5. What, if anything, would you like to change about the program?

Appendix E

Student Athlete Survey (Form B)

Gender: Male Female Sport: _____

Circle one response for each of the following items.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Does Not Apply
1. Study Habits:					
I took good notes.	1	2	3	4	5
I completed assignments on time.	1	2	3	4	5
I prepared for tests in advance.	1	2	3	4	5
I set aside study time.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I attended tutoring sessions when recommended.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I attended class regularly	1	2	3	4	5
4. I understand responsibilities of being a college student better than when the semester began.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I worked as hard academically as I did athletically.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I was able to balance school, study, practice, work, and a social life.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I believe I am as skilled academically as the average community college student.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I had a harder time than most students at this college.	1	2	3	4	5

Please continue to the back page.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Does Not Apply
9. I plan to graduate from this college.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The Strategies for College course helped me realize what is expected of me as a student.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Progress reports helped me monitor my academic growth.	1	2	3	4	5

12. My academic goal is _____

Appendix F

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR ATHLETES

SECTION 1: ***(To be completed by the coach)***

Name: _____ SS#: _____

Local Address: _____ Local Phone: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____

Permanent Address: _____ Permanent Phone: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Sport: _____ Coach: _____

SECTION 2: ***(To be completed by the Assessment Center)***

IVCC Accuplacer Test Scores: Course Placement:

English: _____ English: _____

Reading: _____ Reading: _____

Math: _____ Math: _____

SECTION 3: ***(To be completed by the counselor)***

Career Interest: _____ Major: _____

IVCC Goal:

___AA ___As ___AAS – Occupational Program _____

ACT Scores: Composite _____ High School Rank: _____

English _____ High School G.P.A: _____

Reading _____

Math _____

Science _____

Advising/Counseling Session:

Date: _____ Counselor: _____

SECTION 4: ***(To be completed by the SFC 1000 instructor)***

Preferred Learning Style: _____

_____

_____

Study Skills Profile: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SFC 1000 Requirement Met: Yes _____ No _____

SECTION 5: ***(To be completed by the Special Populations Coordinator)***

Documented Disability: Yes_____ No_____

Specific Disability: _____

_____

Academic Accommodation: _____

_____

_____

Courses Enrolled		Final Grade
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		

Semester: _____

Course	Drop	Date	Add	Date

Semester G.P.A. _____ Cumulative G.P.A. _____

Athletic G.P.A. _____

Study Group Weekly Attendance			
1.	5.	9.	13.
2.	6.	10.	14.
3.	7.	11.	15.
4.	8.	12.	16.

Study Group Schedule: _____

_____

Courses Enrolled		Final Grade
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		

Semester: _____

Course	Drop	Date	Add	Date

Semester G.P.A. _____ Cumulative G.P.A. _____

Athletic G.P.A. _____

Study Group Weekly Attendance			
1.	5.	9.	13.
2.	6.	10.	14.
3.	7.	11.	15.
4.	8.	12.	16.

Study Group Schedule: _____

_____

Appendix G

STUDENT AHTLETE ACADEMIC PROGRESS REPORT

Student: **Course and Section Number:**

Coach: **Sport:**

Instructions:
Students: Please provide this form to the appropriate instructor during his/her designated office hours.
Instructors: Please complete this report as thoroughly as possible.
Coaches: Please review this form and provide a signature and appropriate comments.

Due Date:	Instructor's Signature	Actual Current Grade	Total # Of Unexcused Absences	Recommend Tutor	Instructor's Comments	Coach's Signature	Coach's Comments
Week 2 August 26		A B C D F W Unable To Determine Pass - Fail		Y N			
Week 5 Sept.16		A B C D F W Unable To Determine Pass - Fail		Y N			
Week 8 Oct. 7		A B C D F W Unable To Determine Pass - Fail		Y N			
Week 11 Oct. 28		A B C D F W Unable To Determine Pass - Fail		Y N			
Week 14 Nov. 18		A B C D F W Unable To Determine Pass - Fail		Y N			

Appendix H

Progress Report Review

Student	Sport	Folder Picked Up	Folder Returned	Instructor Signature	Number of Absences This Period	D, F, W Grades	Tutoring Recommended	Coach Signature	Comments

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

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